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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
OFFICE OF SECRETARY

July 6, 1995

Honorable Andrew C. Barrett  
Commissioner  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20554

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Dear Commissioner Barrett:

In response to the Federal Communications Commission's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking No. 8610, Infinity Broadcasting of Maryland, licensee of WLIF-FM, Baltimore, Maryland submits the following comments on the proposed licensing and service rules for Satellite Digital Audio Radio ("DARS"). WLIF-FM's parent corporation, Infinity Broadcasting Corporation, may submit its own comments in this docket prior to the comment deadline, but this letter is submitted to reflect the local perspective of WLIF-FM on the issue of Satellite DARS.

As General Manager of Radio Station WLIF-FM, I am writing to express my concern about the significant impact that Satellite Digital Audio Radio ("DARS") and the licensing and service rules for DARS to be drafted by the FCC will have on WLIF-FM and its listeners in the Baltimore area. WLIF-FM, along with others in the broadcast industry, supports the Commission's attempts to make technological advances such as digital radio available to listeners nationwide. It is important for the Commission to understand, however, that the decisions it makes in bringing about technological changes will dramatically alter the local marketplace for radio stations nationwide and are almost certain to have a negative effect on the ability of local broadcasters such as WLIF-FM to serve their communities of license.

As you know, a radio station's basic FCC obligation is to provide the station's community of license with programs to meet its needs and interests. Currently WLIF-FM provides listeners with local news and weather reports, disaster warnings, numerous public service announcements, traffic reports and weekly programs such as "Baltimore Sunday Morning," "Network 2000," "First Up," and "Sunday Morning" which address

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issues of concern to listeners in the Baltimore metropolitan area. In the future, however, if WLIF-FM is forced to compete for advertising revenue with 60 new state-of-the-art Satellite DARS "super stations" in our market, WLIF-FM may be forced to dramatically reduce or eliminate many of these local public affairs programs and community outreach efforts. Given the fixed costs of operating a radio station in a highly competitive market such as Baltimore, any loss in national advertising revenues to satellite super stations, however small, will have a significant impact on WLIF-FM's overall profits and our ability to serve local needs.

Although proponents of Satellite DARS will argue that WLIF-FM's listeners in the Baltimore area will continue to tune into the station for local information, the Commission needs to understand that local radio stations like WLIF-FM survive on ratings alone. Our station needs listeners to tune in for a set amount of time each day in order to keep our ratings at a level sufficient to attract local and national advertisers. If 60 new satellite super stations are introduced in the Baltimore area, listeners are likely to tune into existing broadcast stations like WLIF-FM only for local information, as needed, thus causing our ratings to drop dramatically along with our revenue and our ultimate ability to remain financially viable. Due to the fact that the Commission's existing ownership rules limit single entities to the ownership of, at most, only four stations in a market, existing operators like WLIF-FM have their "hands tied" by regulations even if they want to compete with satellite operators who will have 60 stations in every market.

As the Commission considers service and licensing rules for Satellite DARS, it should keep in mind that there are a number of ways to minimize the impact of satellite radio on existing community-based broadcasters such as WLIF-FM.

First, the Commission should remove existing national and local ownership limits on terrestrial broadcasts to allow a station like ours to compete fairly with satellite operators. Second, the Commission should avoid creating a competitive quality gap between existing radio broadcasters and satellite radio by allowing in-band on-channel terrestrial digital radio to be licensed first to determine if Satellite DARS is even needed. Third, satellite radio ventures should be prohibited from using ground-based equipment such as



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terrestrial repeaters to reinforce their signals in urban areas where satellite signals are often blocked. Fourth, Satellite DARS licensees should be required to carry the niche programming (such as service to rural listeners, minority and ethnic groups) they have promised the FCC they would offer. Fifth, Satellite DARS services should be subscription-supported so that operators have an economic framework to permit delivery of niche programming to specialized or geographically dispersed markets. Sixth, because they are functionally equivalent to broadcasters, DARS operators should be subject to the same public interest obligations as broadcasters, including but not limited to reasonable access and equal opportunity provisions. Finally, in order to ensure that Satellite DARS is implemented in a manner that preserves and augments existing local radio, the Commission should allocate 50% of available frequencies to existing radio broadcasters or should open the DARS proceeding to allow new applicants.

WLIF-FM looks forward to working with the Commission as the broadcast industry moves into the digital age. At the same time, WLIF-FM urges the Commission to take into consideration the realities of the existing broadcast marketplace as it moves toward bringing technological advances to listeners of our station and other stations nationwide.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K.C. Stevens".

Kenneth C. Stevens  
Vice President/General Manager

KCS/mab